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Young Women's Christian Association of the U.S.A.

Beginnings among colored women

New York

1913

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YOUNG WOMEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION

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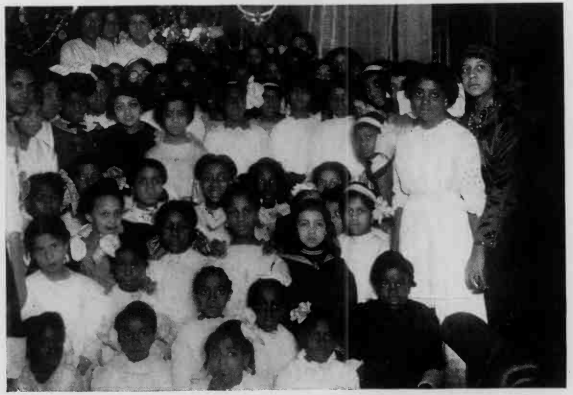
Beginnings Among Colored Women

National Board
Young Womens Christian Associations
of the United States of America
600 Lexington Avenue
New York
1913

Sept. 12 1923 HUT

NOTE

This leaflet is compiled by Mrs. A. W. Hunton, who has served the National Board in organizing city Young Women's Christian Associations among colored women. Mrs. Hunton's intimate understanding of the special problems of her own race gives authority to this analysis of the present opportunities for Christian work among colored women.



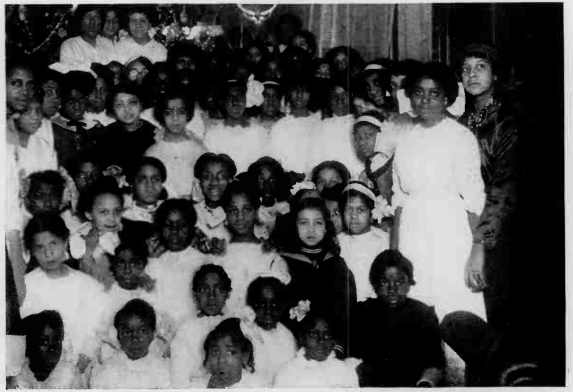
"A RACE IS AS GOOD AS ITS WOMEN—NO BETTER"

THE present status of the colored race in the United States is its greatest challenge to an aggressive campaign for its own betterment. It is the duty of the generation of today to transmit to the future a vastly larger portion of health and every-day joy in living, of practical wisdom and Christianity, of moral and mental industriousness, than was its own heritage.

The colored woman has an enviable share in this effort for a future of greater strength and purity. It is, therefore, good to know that she is rightly interpreting the present spirit of intensified service, and in spite of narrow environment, prejudice, poverty and ignorance, with their attendant evils, she has set her face toward the exaltation of truth and right.

This little leaflet attempts to show how the Young Women's Christian Association, under the supervision of the National Board, is meeting a manifest need in this effort for race advancement; and how colored women themselves have been quick to discern its

INTENTIONAL SECOND EXPOSURE



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adaptability to meet the varying needs of all classes and conditions of women, and have hastened to organize Associations wherever possible. Lastly, this leaflet hopes to awaken to a larger co-operative sympathy all who believe in the democracy of Christianity and who have recognized that the supreme call of the hour is the extension of God's kingdom here on earth.

HISTORICAL

The history of Association effort among colored women under its present progressive policy dates back but five years, but the history of Association beginnings among them extends over a quarter of a century. Twenty years ago there were affiliated with the American Committee of Young Women's Christian Associations seven colored student Associations. There are evidences of city Associations for colored women at a much earlier period. We

hear of efforts at Louisville, Memphis, Columbus, Ga., and other points. Dr. Caroline Anderson, the well-known daughter of William Still of underground railway fame, recounts the activities of a flourishing colored Association in Philadelphia in the early seventies. Yet no doubt most of these efforts died for want of intelligent supervision.

In the fall of 1907, when the newly organized National Board decided to extend its supervision to work among colored women, it sent out a representative who spent the winter in a study of that particular field, and in finding a suitable woman for the supervision of the work in colored schools. It was ascertained that there were fourteen student Associations in colored schools. Only seven of this number, however, were devoting themselves to any real Association activities, and of the several efforts found in cities, but four were worthy of the name Young Women's Christian Association.

STUDENT WORK

In the spring of 1908, Miss Elizabeth Ross was called by the National Board to be its special worker in colored schools, and after some preparation began an earnest and vigorous service in a practically new field of endeavor. Miss Ross was married in 1910, and was succeeded in the student field by Miss Cecelia Holloway, who has also given two years of no less enthusiastic supervision to this work; she in turn has been succeeded by Miss Josephine Pinyon.

It was a stroke of great wisdom when the National Board placed on its program, in the early days of its existence, the extension of Association work among colored students. When we reflect that the hope of the colored race today centers about its student life, we can comprehend how vital is this infusion into it of one great common aim of Christian loyalty and service.

Five years is but a short time in the life of any movement, yet

it has been long enough to produce results showing the value of the Association to students and their appreciation of it.

From fourteen student Associations in 1908, in eight different states, to eighty in 1913 in twenty-eight states, is a record of positive advance. But figures cannot estimate the quickening that has come into the lives of colored girls as a result of Association influence.

CITY WORK

In 1908, four cities had colored Young Women's Christian Associations. In 1910, Mrs. Elizabeth Ross Haynes, in conjunction with Mrs. A. W. Hunton, undertook the supervision of the city work. In January, 1913, Miss Eva D. Bowles was called as special worker for the National Board for city work. There are now sixteen city Associations with an aggregate membership of 3,034, small beginnings in six other cities, and calls for organization

from many other points. These Associations are in two groups—independent Associations, and branches directly responsible to the central Associations of their respective cities. The strongest Associations thus far, however, are those having branch relationship. This is true because the branch relationship gives greater surety of constant and competent supervision. All of the six secretaries now employed in colored Associations are to be found in branches.

Just a word of commendation for the efforts of the colored women towards self-support. By their own effort they have paid for homes aggregating in value $16,000. It is further worthy of note that Associations employing secretaries have usually raised their first year's expense budget unaided, before calling a secretary.

The ideal of the city Association is being realized among colored women as far as their limited financial backing and equipment will permit. These limited resources compel them to stress those activities most vital to their respective communities. In the North, where

the girl is oftener without, than with, a home, great emphasis is placed upon meeting her social needs and keeping away that dull loneliness that is so often her despair and downfall. The employment bureau is a large feature of these Associations, and in Brooklyn and New York this work alone calls for the full time of one secretary. In these two Associations more than 2,000 girls and women were assembled in socials during the past year. At Norfolk it is the migratory girl, who "just must go North" and on her way touches at that seaport, who needs care, and the little Association there has been of great help to the Travelers Aid workers of the White Rose Home and Protective Association in giving room and board—sometimes free—to the girl who is passing through the city.

The Washington Association is filling a long felt need in that city, giving a protecting shelter to strangers and centralizing the activities of the women. Only this past summer numbers of colored women from the far West, South and Northwest, who had come

East for the national Association convention, felt free to visit the Capital and New York because they could stop in the Association homes. St. Louis has given much time to the development of physical work and in building up a junior department. It has the first group of Camp Fire Girls in a colored Association. Classes of many kinds have come as a godsend to either the busy woman or the inefficient worker, through these Associations. They have not only engendered a larger interest in the Bible, but have broken down denominational barriers and exalted Christianity.

CONFERENCES

Six week-end student conferences have been held within the past three years in as many different states and schools of the South. The growth of the conference spirit is attested in the eagerness with which our students await and receive their conference announcements, and the sacrifices made to send delegates. It is in

Courtesy of The Crisis.

Are not "beginnings" worth while for the future of such as these?

INTENTIONAL SECOND EXPOSURE

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these conferences that one comes to realize how much the Association means to our girls. It has developed in them a spirit of loyalty to Christ and is training them for effective Christian service. It has given an impetus to Bible study and mission work, established new social ideals, and turned their attention to the importance of the right kind of physical life. One could hardly look out upon the sea of upturned eager student faces in one of these conferences and fail to believe that the Association movement has come to meet a manifest need in the lives of the 15,000 colored girls in our institutions.

A conference of employed and volunteer workers in colored city Associations was held in New York in June, 1912. Twenty-five women from five states and the District of Columbia, representing eight Associations and two Association clubs, spent four busy days working earnestly to grow richer in Association knowledge and in the power of its dissemination. This conference marked a new

epoch in colored city Association activity, for it brought us face to face with our greatest possibilities as well as our weaknesses and needs, and sent us forth to work with clearer vision and deeper inspiration than ever before possible.

THE FUTURE

The need of adequate buildings and equipment and of trained workers, is pressing hard upon us. Just a few days ago, a woman came begging for accommodation in one of our Associations, and as the secretary sadly turned her away because of the already overcrowded dormitories, she said, "This is the fourth woman I have had to send elsewhere today." This instance is but an illustration of the fact constantly confronting us, that the colored city Association, because of its limited resources, is able to reach but a small number of women. And yet, great as is the need for buildings and equipment, it is no greater than that for trained workers, both

volunteer and employed. No agencies can help us so much in this direction as conferences for the former, and the courses at our training centers or the National Training School in New York, for the latter. For all of this is required a greater financial investment than we have been able to command. When some of our friends have realized that money invested in this great work means not only the spiritual and moral regeneration of four and a half millions of women in the United States, but the advancement of the nation and of the kingdom of God here on earth, then will Association work among colored women come into its own.

WHAT PEOPLE SAY

Mrs. Betty G. Francis, President, Colored Young Women's Christian Association, Washington, D. C.

"No city is, to my mind, thoroughly equipped to protect materially and to help spiritually its young women, unless it has a well-organized Young Women's Christian Association. There is a feeling of satisfaction and contentment in the minds of the women of a city who know that they have put forth their best efforts to give help to any young woman who may need it."

Miss Arsania M. Williams, President, Phyllis Wheatley Branch Young Women's Christian Association, St. Louis, Mo.

"No other social agency has supplied the need of our girls in St. Louis as has the Young Women's Christian Association. Its

method of studying the problems of the city, and roundly meeting the needs of the city's girls, is a stimulus to the social life of the community. The radiating influence of the great Association spirit is acknowledged by church and social worker alike, in our city."

Mrs. Josephine B. Bruce, Washington, D. C.

"We are in the midst of a society so complex that unless we stop to take account of ourselves and our young people, we shall presently find that the tendency of the times is far away from the useful and righteous life. The best safeguard, the best anchorage, that we know of, is to be found in that wonderful organization known as the Young Women's Christian Association, which gives shelter, protection, guidance, entertainment and employment to our young people, who in many instances would be stranded and lost but for the open heart and home of the organization."

Miss Lucy H. Tapley, President, Spelman Seminary, Atlanta, Ga.

"We expect and receive from the Young Women's Christian Association loyal co-operation that makes for the best good and development of our students and the school. Composed of the older and more firmly established Christian girls, it aids greatly in advancing the work of the several other religious organizations of the seminary, and exerts a wholesome influence on the more irresponsible and careless students."

Reverend F. G. Woodworth, D. D., President, Tougaloo University, Tougaloo, Miss.

"The Association at Tougaloo has a growing power, and is constantly better appreciated. I heartily commend the work done by the local Association and the National Board, among the young women of the colored people."

Mrs. Booker T. Washington, Tuskegee Institute, Tuskegee, Ala.

"I know of no organization doing more for the uplift of our women than the Young Women's Christian Association."

Byrd Prillerman, President, West Virginia Colored Institute, Institute, W. Va.

"The Association gives the girls greater incentive to Bible study, and affords them the opportunity to engage in religious work among themselves. I find that the active workers in the Association are Christian workers when they leave school."

W. S. Scarborough, President, Wilberforce University, Wilberforce, Ohio.

"We shall be glad, as an institution, to contribute to the prosperity of our Young Women's Christian Association in every possible way. We feel that the Association deserves encouragement and should in every way be sustained."

J. M. Metcalf, President, Talladega College, Talladega, Ala.

"I am very strongly convinced of the value of the Christian Association to the young women of Talladega College. The authorities here want to do everything in their power to encourage this work and to make it effective."

J. H. Johnston, President, Normal and Industrial Institute, Petersburg, Va.

"The work of the Young Women's Christian Association not only helps to keep our moral and religious atmosphere clean, but develops the young women so that when they leave they can master themselves and make excellent leaders among our people in church and community life."

Miss Dora A. Scribner, Professor of English, Fiske University, Nashville, Tenn.

"To me the greatest value of the Christian Association comes from the intercollegiate meetings, with their exchange of ideas, and from visits from Association secretaries, especially from the visitor whom our young women can claim as their very own."

James E. Shephard, President, National Religious Training School, Durham, N. C.

"To my mind, there is no greater agency outside of the church, for the development of young womanhood, than the Young Women's Christian Association. In fact, the Association gets hold of many whom the church has failed to reach. I have particularly observed its work in schools and colleges, and I have seen lives

changed for service. I have seen definite purposes take form where before interest was simply drifting. I have seen a love for health given by practising those things which make for good health. But above all, I have seen the Christian spirit enthroned."

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